

Legislative Background

The United States Congress reauthorized the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA), as amended by the Sustainable Fisheries Act (SFA), on October 11, 1996. Section 404 (Fisheries Research) of the MSFCMA requires the Secretary of Commerce to develop and publish in the *Federal Register* a strategic plan for fisheries research for the five years immediately following such publication. The Act stipulates that the plan:

- Identify and describe a comprehensive program with a limited number of priority objectives for research in each of the research areas specified below.
- Indicate goals and timetables for the program.
- Provide a role for commercial fishers in such research, including involvement in field testing.
- Provide for collection and dissemination, in a timely manner, of complete and accurate information concerning fishing activities, catch, effort, stock assessments, and other research conducted under this section.
- Be developed in cooperation with the fishery management councils and affected states, and provide for coordination with the councils, affected states, and other research entities.

The MSFCMA requires that the comprehensive program contain the following areas of research:

- Research to support fishery conservation and management, including but not limited to:
 - biological research concerning the abundance, trends, and life history of stocks of fish,
 - the interdependence of fisheries or stocks of fish and their ecosystem,
 - the identification of essential fish habitat,
 - the impact of pollution on fish populations,
 - the impact of wetland and estuarine degradation, and
 - other factors affecting the abundance and availability of fish.
- Conservation engineering research, including:
 - the study of fish behavior,
 - the development and testing of new gear technology and fishing techniques to minimize bycatch and any adverse effects on essential fish habitat, and
 - the promotion of efficient harvest of target species.

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- Research on the fisheries, including:

the social, cultural, and economic relationships among fishing vessel owners, crew, fish processors, associated shoreside labor, seafood markets, and fishing communities.
 - Information management research, including:

the development of a fishery information base and an information management system under Section 401 that will permit the full use of information in the support of effective fishery conservation and management.